



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
Department of Human Services
Office of Rehabilitation Services
STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL



To work with the ORS assuring that all Rhode Islanders with disabilities are able to obtain and keep meaningful and satisfying employment.

SRC Meeting May 5, 2020
Zoom Conference
9:30 A.M. – 11:00 A.M.

Present: Dr. Judith Drew, Chair SRC and Program Director, Rehabilitation Counseling Program at [Salve Regina University](#)
Catherine Sansonetti, Vice-Chair SRC, Attorney at [Disability Rights Rhode Island](#)
Jack Ringland, Secretary SRC, Co-Coordinator of [RI Cross Disability Coalition](#)
Community members/CRP members:
Christina Battista, representing the [RI Statewide Independent Living Council](#)
Christine Botts, Deputy Administrator of the [Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals](#)
Melissa Brusso, Educational Advocate for the [Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities](#)
Anne Fartura, Peer Support Coordinator/Special Education at [RI Parent Information Network \(RIPIN\)](#)
Barbara Fernandez, Legal Advocate at [Disability Rights Rhode Island](#)
Nina Fiasconaro, a Parent Advocate for a child with disabilities
Joan Fino, Social Worker and Patient Advocate at [Rhode Island Primary Care Physicians](#)
Paul Harden, Director of the [RI Small Business Development Center](#), at URI
Nicole Rico Serrano, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, for the [Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation Vocational Rehabilitation Services](#)
Jane Slade, State Transition Coordinator at the [Department of Education](#)
Christine Yankee, Vice President of Program Services at [Goodwill Industries of Southern New England](#)

Office of Rehabilitation Services:

Linda Deschenes (Assistant Administrator of Operations), Ronald Racine (Associate Director), Natalia Montoya (Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor), Joseph Murphy (Administrator, Vocational Rehabilitation), John Valentine (Strategic Planning Supervisor)

Guests: Tracey Cunningham-Martins M. A., Associate Director of Employment, for the [Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals](#)

Jennifer Doucette, Director of Regional transition, for [West Bay Collaborative](#)

Sharon DiPinto, Human Services Policy & Systems Specialist at the Office of Rehabilitation Services

Allison Hitte Robinson, Program Coordinator, for the [Office of Disability Services](#) at CCRI Knight Campus

Carol Mattson, Retired Chief Human Services Business Officer, for the Office of Rehabilitation services

1. Establish Quorum/Introductions Guests, ORS, and SRC – Quorum met.

2. Agenda Review/Additions or Deletions

3. Approval of Minutes from February 4, 2020

Motion Paul Harden made a motion seconded by Jack Ringland and unanimously approved to accept the February 4, 2020 minutes. (Voting Members – Christina Battista, Christine Botts, Melissa Brusso, Dr. Judith Drew, Anne Fartura, Barbara Fernandez, Nina Fiasconaro, Joan Fino, Paul Harden, Jack Ringland, Catherine Sansonetti, Nicole Rico Serrano, Jane Slade and Christine Yankee).

4. Summary of Follow-ups from Meeting

- Materials will be sent out for review and meetings will be planned to start working on the Comprehensive Needs Assessment.

4. [The Office of Rehabilitation Services](#) Director's Report – Ron Racine

- COVID-19 – The Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) has been working reactively to set up a new working from home system and internal processes for contact with clients. The first phase of re-opening will have 80 percent of ORS staff

working from home. This will cut down on the health risks to staff and clients. Safety in the workplace for our clients and the ORS staff is now the priority. ORS will monitor the safety of the clients as they gradually transition back to work, or start new employment. ORS has developed several outlines for initial guidance on safety in the workplace for the clients, caregivers and employers.

- [The Rehabilitation Services Administration](#) (RSA), is working on waivers for some of the Rehabilitation programs. One is, for Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), which ORS is normally required to use 15 percent of its budget on. The U.S. Secretary of Education is working with Congress to temporarily remove that requirement due to COVID-19.
- ORS Expenditures - Until COVID-19, ORS had ample funds available for services but now that the effects of the pandemic are clear, the ORS counselors reassessing the financial status of all services and how best to prioritize funding for client's needs.
 - a) Short-term funding is solid, but there is not a clear idea what will happen moving forward. The majority of ORS personal are working from home, so travel expenses are low.
 - b) The state safety guidelines are keeping most of the clients at home; this has dramatically lowered requests for services for current clients with ORS.
 - c) Longer outlooks for funding are uncertain. ORS has experienced an increase of new applicants. This may be due to people losing their jobs because of COVID-19, or it could be because ORS' Waitlist is shorter.
 - d) ORS staff are reaching out to former clients who are reapplying for assistance to determine what is driving that increase in reapplication.
 - e) ORS will keep the Council updated as more information is available.
- The Rhode Island Department of Health has a 24-hour hotline for anyone with questions about the Coronavirus (401-222-8022). There is additional guidance on its website (<https://health.ri.gov/>). Residents can also call (211) for assistance.

5. Rhode Island State Rehabilitation Council Outstanding Service Award 2020

1. Carol Mattson, Retired Chief Human Services Business Officer for the Office of Rehabilitation services.
 - Upon her retirement, the transition for the new Business Officer went smoothly because Carol had developed a succession plan, which had not been in place when Carol started her position 25 years ago. Of the years that Carol worked she noted that the past few have been some of the most challenging. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and changes due to the Waitlist meant constant reassessments and audits from her department. Her assistance with the financial aspect of the Waitlist has enabled ORS to quickly and smoothly move clients off the Waitlist. At the last RSA site review, the reviewers were very impressed with a form Carol developed to get pre-approval with expenses. As a result, they decided to encourage national adoption of the form by other states.
 - Ron Racine praised Carol by saying Carol's contribution was crucial to the work of ORS since the finance system is the engine that helps the agency do its work. Without her skills and collaboration, ORS could not have navigated all the changes over the past few years.
2. Tracey Cunningham-Martins M. A., Associate Director of Employment, Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH)

Tracey was honored for her work in NY, Massachusetts and RI. Her long career in the field has focused on working with individuals with ID/DD and agencies that serve them to customize employment practices. Tracey spoke briefly about her career before coming to RI. She has been working at BHDDH for the past four years with agencies who are providing customized employment practices for people with ID/DD.

- She spoke about the different groups building collaborative relationships including the RI Department of Education (RIDE), ORS, and BHDDH and how they have worked together in the vested interest of the Consent Decree and [Employment First](#). Tracey stated they are working to build trust with clients during the transition. She advised they are providing a variety of professional development opportunities for their staff and providers.

- BHDDH is working hard to become a data collection source for other agencies. Performance Based Programs like Person Centered Employment Performance Programs are data collection heavy. This data collection has helped with the effects of COVID-19 tracking of job rates and losses. We can track what post-Covid world looks like. Many of our clients are having a hard time with the changes due to the pandemic. We are helping clients get technology to better their ability to work and just have social interactions.
- BHDDH Collaborations – Let’s Get to Work, is a collection of all the sister agencies, and how do we get providers to look at employment for all.

6. SRC Chair’s Report

- COVID-19 Impact on Mental Health and Clients – COVID-19 has had significant effect on mental health but telehealth is helping people and making treatment more accessible. Clients report they feel more supported and engaged with their counselors. There has not been a significant increase in hospitalizations for people with mental health issues so far due to Covid-19, which might be due to the availability of telehealth services. These services will most likely increase moving forward and continue into the foreseeable future.
- Training Grant for VR Counselors - [Salve Regina University](#) is proposing a grant to support recruiting, training, and educating for Rehabilitation Counselors. The proposed grant will recruit 30 people over 3 - 4 years. If anyone knows someone who would be a great Rehabilitation Counselor, please let Judi know. Some of the funds will be reserved for current students, while other funds will go towards recruiting new students into the program to educate and prepare the next generation of rehabilitation counselors. Judi stated she would know by the fall if the grant was approved, and would be recruiting by the spring next year for new students in the program. Contact Judi if anyone is interested in more information.
- Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA) –The assessment is due in the early part of 2021. It typically has five sections related to ORS staff and clients. The SRC will be surveying the Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs). The timeframe would be to conduct the survey over the summer so that data would be available to review and interpret going into August. ORS has shared the 2017 CNA, Survey and its results, the vendor list and the job developer list with the CNA working committee. The following SRC council members agreed to work on any needed revisions to the survey and compile the results for the report Melissa Brusso, Barbara Fernandes, Catherine Sansonetti, Christine Yankee, Christine Botts, and Judi Drew.
- VR 100th Anniversary Celebrations - Judi will share a link with Nancy to send out to everyone.

7. Public Comment – There were none.

8. Correspondence – There were none.

9. Adjournment - The meeting was adjourned at 10:45 P.M.

Motion – *Jane Slade made a motion seconded by Joan Fino, and unanimously approved, to adjourn the May 5, 2020 meeting. (Voting Members - Christina Battista, Christine Botts, Melissa Brusso, Dr. Judith Drew, Anne Fartura, Barbara Fernandez, Nina Fiasconaro, Joan Fino, Paul Harden, Jack Ringland, Catherine Sansonetti, Nicole Rico Serrano, Jane Slade and Christine Yankee).*

Respectfully Submitted,
Nancy Baker
 Nancy Baker, Staff, RISRC